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ABSTRACT

Frontline social services workers are the heart and soul of our nation's publicly funded human services system. Conservatively estimated at about 3 million, these workers have a tremendous impact on the life chances of vulnerable children and families. This vital role prompted Casey Foundation staff to conduct an in-depth exploration of job conditions on the frontlines for workers in the following sectors: child welfare, child care, juvenile justice, youth services, and employment and training. The first section of this paper describes the findings on the demographics of the frontline human services workforce, the numbers of people who hold these jobs, and what they do. The second part of the paper discusses the challenges to the workforce and the issues that hold back improvements in service delivery. In the third section, promising examples of reforms already under way are outlined. And the fourth section discusses the Foundation' next steps in addressing this issue and promoting reform. (Contains 292 references and 6 tables.) (GCP)

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the unsolved challenge of system reform

THE CONDITION OF THE FRONTLINE HUMAN SERVICES WORKFORCE

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Problems of the Human Services Workforce

Frontline social services workers are the heart and soul of our nation's publicly funded human services system. Conservatively estimated at about 3 million, these workers have a tremendous impact on the life chances of vulnerable children and families. This vital role prompted Casey Foundation staff to conduct an in-depth exploration of job conditions on the frontlines for workers in the following sectors: child welfare, child care, juvenile justice, youth services, and employment and training. Our research led us to define eight key factors that—by general agreement—pose the greatest challenge to this workforce:

- Nonprofit, government, and for-profit employers cannot find sufficient numbers of quality staff
- When they do, too many of those workers do not stay
- Workers are paid less than those in other jobs at comparable levels
- There is limited opportunity for professional growth and advancement
- Workers receive poor supervision, and little guidance or support
- Rule-bound jobs leave little latitude for discretion and drive out the most entrepreneurial workers
- The education and training these workers receive do not match the roles and demands actually encountered on the job
- Workers are paid less than those in other jobs that require comparable skills

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These widespread problems not only undermine the effectiveness of system reform efforts; they reveal inefficient use of our public resources and present very real risks to the welfare of already vulnerable families and children.

Promising Approaches to Solving the Problem

Despite the weaknesses of these frontline sectors, Foundation staff found evidence of several approaches that are yielding significant improvement. Our research suggests that human services systems with the following attributes have a real chance of recruiting and holding the kinds of quality workers that make a difference for children and families.

- **FLEXIBILITY AND FREEDOM** to recruit for the skills needed by the work to be done
- **REWARDS FOR SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE** and effectiveness
- **REASONABLE WORKLOADS** that let workers deploy their skills
- **CAREER PATHS** that build on workers' skills rather than moving them "up and out"
- **CLEAR PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS** that relate to a coherent organizational mission
- **TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT** opportunities on the job
- **ABILITY TO CHANGE BAD MANAGEMENT** and supervision
- **ADEQUATE BASE COMPENSATION** that can help stem turnover

The Foundation's Role in Promoting Practices That Foster Real Improvements

Although our study of the human services workforce is still at a relatively early stage, we believe it is important to map out how the Foundation can use the knowledge we have gathered to 1) bring attention to this issue and 2) garner support for our agenda. We envision the Foundation taking on a leadership role — no such leadership currently exists — that could potentially engage us in five areas:

- **GATHERING EVIDENCE** to increase public awareness of the problem and help guide future action by policymakers
- **DOCUMENTING AND PROMOTING** proven and promising practices in the field
- **PROVIDING INFORMED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE** to states and localities willing to address the problem
- **SUPPORTING AND EVALUATING** demonstrations of promising initiatives
- **CREATING A NATIONAL COMMISSION** to focus attention and action on the issue

introduction

Frontline social services workers are the heart and soul of our nation's publicly funded human services system. This legion of child welfare case managers, probation officers, preschool teachers, and employment specialists is frequently the only connection between vulnerable families and the organized systems of social services designed to help them.

An enormous responsibility is placed in the hands of these workers. They are expected to perform difficult interventions and make skilled judgments that have the power to shift the trajectory of a family's life. A frontline worker's recommendations can determine whether or not a mother is reunited with her children in foster care; whether a youth is returned to detention; or whether a struggling family receives help to make the transition from welfare to work.

The Foundation's survey led us to conservatively estimate the frontline human services workforce at about 3 million.

These jobs are hard. They require compassion and skill. Their attendant challenges are not financially rewarded or adequately supported. Indeed, frontline human services work is characterized by low pay, heavy workloads, and excessive regulation. Lack of training and poor support cause many to leave the field, and those who do stay are typically motivated by values and a sense of mission that is stronger than the work's disincentives.

We know that the public has high expectations for frontline human services. Workers are charged with handling some of the most troubling contradictions in our society and are expected to compensate for unjust economic distributions, abusive families, and inadequate educational systems. This combination of difficult tasks and high expectations has created an untenable situation and it is not surprising that juvenile justice workers may fail to turn around troubled youth, or child care workers may not adequately help preschool-age children reach their developmental potential. By the same token, it is not surprising that the public lacks confidence that a child welfare worker knows how and when to help families in crisis.

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Human services delivery is reaching a state of crisis. Frontline jobs are becoming more and more complex while the responsibility placed on workers remains severely out of line with their preparation and baseline abilities. Many are leaving the field while a new generation of college graduates shows little interest in entering the human services sector. Millions of taxpayer dollars are being poured into a compromised system that not only achieves little in the way of real results, but its interventions often do more harm than good. It is clear that frontline human services jobs are not attracting and keeping the kinds of workers we need, and that regulations, unreasonable expectations, and poor management practices mire workers and their clients in a dangerous status quo.

DOL counts social workers two different ways—neither of which can be correlated with the publicly funded delivery of human services.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is committed to helping vulnerable children and their families. We believe that the current state of human services delivery effectively undermines the communities we try to protect and challenges the human services system reform work we have been pursuing for some time. Within the Foundation's mandate to support vulnerable children, we want to support the systems that are established to help them. Indeed, promoting reform for the frontline human services sector constitutes a natural extension of the Foundation's mission.

The Foundation has been considering this possibility for some time. We know that a host of other organizations play some role in minding these issues and we wished to ascertain where we could fit into an overall policy and reform effort. To these ends, Foundation staff spent a year learning as much as we could about the field by reviewing the existing literature and practice regarding frontline human services. We looked for studies that would reveal how many people are engaged in these jobs, the nature and challenges of this difficult and caring work, and the attempts that have been made to improve conditions and outcomes.

At the outset of our research, we anticipated that a preliminary scan would give us an overview of the field while revealing pockets of deeper knowledge that could be studied at a later date. What we found, however, were scattershot data and a dearth of good information. We found egregious examples of system dysfunction and waste, even as we uncovered promising strategies and improvements. Yet, significantly, the sources we were able to find offered only small and selective snapshots of a large and unwieldy problem.

This finding was a significant factor in persuading the Foundation of the lack of leadership on this issue and that we were in a position to make significant contributions if we chose to enter the field. With the unanimous support of our Board of Directors, we agreed that frontline human services is an issue that we should be addressing, that we will take an active part in this policy area, and that we will work toward reforms that will attract and keep the kinds of workers needed to do these vital jobs.

This paper attempts to outline the findings that led us to this conclusion. In it, we wish to offer the clearest possible picture culled from disparate and incomplete sources. What follows does not purport to be an exhaustive academic study. Rather, our goal was to assemble enough information to understand the issues that compromise frontline services delivery and to frame an informed and actionable agenda. In describing our findings, we hope to persuade others that frontline human services delivery is a policy area in desperate need of attention and to engage partners in taking action with us.

The first section of this paper describes our findings on the demographics of the frontline human services workforce, the numbers of people who hold these jobs, and what they do. The second part of the paper discusses the challenges to the workforce and the issues that hold back improvements in service delivery. In the third section, we outline promising examples of reforms already under way. And in the fourth section, we discuss the Foundation's next steps in addressing this issue and promoting reform.

Children with close child/teacher relationships in child care had better classroom social and thinking skills, language ability, and math skills. These benefits last through the second grade. *(Peisner-Feinberg, Culkin, et al., and Peisner-Feinberg and Burchinal, 1997)*

Two issues have shaped our thinking about how to approach human services reform and deserve to be mentioned at the paper's outset. They will be discussed in greater depth in the sections that follow. The first is the way frontline human services jobs are identified. Millions of people do this caring work, yet they are not viewed as a workforce with the attendant power and recognition that the label "workforce" provides. The Foundation believes that naming this workforce will be a critical factor in raising its profile and calling attention to its problems. However, although there are many shared problems in human services work, to place all frontline jobs under the same heading could oversimplify the concerns in each sector. Child welfare, for example, has problems that are different from those in juvenile justice. We do not wish to obscure these differences, and in this paper

we will refer to frontline human services as a series of sectors, pointing out the issues that cut across job functions and the problems that seem to be sector specific.

Early childhood programs can produce large effects on IQ with significant, persistent effects on achievement, grade retention, special education, high school graduation, and socialization. These effects are large enough to make meaningful differences in the lives of children from low-income families. *(Barnett 43, 1995)*

The second issue we wish to call attention to is the problem of policymaking in this complex area. When we undertook our preliminary scan, we hoped to find examples of promising reform attempts. And we did find them. Yet what we found was not one or two useful solutions, but a wide variety of strategies that were working in their own context. We mention this at the paper's outset because the field of frontline human services delivery is so large and its challenges so overwhelming that policymakers might be inclined to choose or favor a few approaches to implement across the board. As in the issue of "naming" the workforce, such action would only serve to obscure the deeper problems. The Foundation's research led us to conclude that there is no one "silver bullet" to solve the problems facing these sectors. However, there are many successful efforts, which provide us with positive indications that frontline human services work can be carried out more effectively and achieve positive outcomes that restore public trust in these vital systems for vulnerable children and families.

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part one

FRONTLINE SOCIAL SERVICES WORKERS: WHO ARE THEY AND WHAT DO THEY DO?

The shortfalls of frontline human services delivery have been apparent for some time. However, reform has been stymied by the lack of a clear sense of how to approach the problem. The Foundation believes this lack of clarity is due, in part, to the dearth of solid information about frontline workers and what they do. Without a clear sense of the existing system, it has been hard for reformers to press their case and suggest alternatives. Similarly, it has left policymakers and opinion leaders unfocused and vague about what course of action to take.

As a first step to approaching the challenge of system reform, the Foundation believed it was necessary to better understand the role played by frontline human services workers. As noted in the introduction, Foundation staff spent a year reviewing the existing literature and practices regarding frontline human services work. In this preliminary scan, we hoped—at a minimum—to derive a count of workers in the field and determine the nature of the work they do. This seemingly straightforward task had never previously been undertaken and was difficult 1) because of the wide range of jobs and job titles in frontline human services and 2) because no tracking system currently counts these workers and can accurately describe their positions and responsibilities.

The national cost of failing to provide at least two years of early childhood education is extremely high—on the order of $100,000 for each child born into poverty, or $400 billion for all poor children under five.
(Barnett 45, 1995)

In the following section, we describe the sectors studied and the challenges faced in gathering data on each of them.

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How Many People Hold Frontline Human Services Jobs?

There is no data source that can tell us how many youth services workers there are in the United States, or, for that matter, the number of workers in juvenile justice.

Our preliminary survey led to a conservative estimate that at least 3 million people make up the frontline human services workforce. This survey included workers in child welfare, child care, juvenile justice, youth services, and employment and training. Initially, our survey also included teachers and home health care workers. Studying these jobs enabled us to learn more about the broader dynamics of human services work. However, because both areas receive significant attention from other organizations, we narrowed our focus to those human services fields where the Foundation has the most experience and where, in our judgment, the interactions between workers and families have great consequence.

child welfare workers: The Foundation looked at social services workers in public and private, nonprofit child welfare agencies, including those who investigate allegations of abuse/neglect. These workers also provide ongoing case management to families, both those with children in placement and those at risk of placement. Our scan included professional social workers as well as paraprofessionals with titles that include case aide, family advocate, family support worker, and family development specialist.

child care workers: The Foundation included the following in our definition of the family and child care workforce: early childhood teachers, teacher aides, and family-based child care workers, whether in formal (licensed) or informal settings.

- **CHILD CARE CENTERS** include teachers and assistants in public and private, nonprofit and for-profit, child care, Head Start, and pre-kindergarten programs.

- **LICENSED FAMILY CHILD CARE PROVIDERS** include caregivers responsible for groups of unrelated children in their homes and are subject to state licensing that typically sets health and safety standards, the size of programs, and, in some cases, the educational requirements of the provider. Whether licensed or unregulated, family child care providers are self-employed workers who collect fees from parents or state funding sources.

- **LICENSE-EXEMPT FAMILY CHILD CARE PROVIDERS** include those that provide care for groups of unrelated children in their homes but are not subject to state licensing. They are typically subject to program size requirements if they receive public funds. Informal care providers, including relatives, are also generally exempt from licensing requirements. Both license-exempt and informal care providers may receive fees from parents or public funds.

We also include paid relatives (usually grandparents) caring for children on a regular basis outside the child's home and nonrelatives (including friends and neighbors) in our estimates of the size of this workforce.

juvenile justice workers: The Foundation studied all those who provide support to youth on the front and back ends of the detention system, case managers working with youth released from detention and staff in residential facilities who provide supervision and care to youth in detention. This workforce is difficult to define; there are many types of jobs in the field and job titles vary greatly. Furthermore, many programs run by government and nonprofit and for-profit agencies deploy staff in everything from detention centers to aftercare outreach to prevention programs. The work these staff do, though it goes by various names and operates in different settings, is clustered into three areas:

Students in after-school programs show better achievement in math, reading, and other subjects. *(Posner and Vandell, 1994)*

- **AFTERCARE WORKERS** provide case management, life skills education, and supervision for youth who have been convicted in the juvenile courts, served time, and have been released. In many states, aftercare and probation are interchangeable titles.

- **RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES STAFF** work within a facility that houses youth who either have been accused of a crime and are awaiting trial or youth who have been convicted and are serving their sentence. There are different types of detention, depending on the crime and the state in which the facility is located, but for the most part, workers in juvenile detention centers are responsible for the health and well-being of youth in their care, providing general counseling and supervision.

- **PROBATION WORKERS** are involved with young people who are at both the front and back ends of the juvenile justice system. About half of all juvenile justice cases

are routed through probation. What these frontline workers do includes case management, screening, and preadjudication investigations for low-risk youth, usually those involved in the system for the first time. On the back end, probation workers supervise youth who are tried for an offense, found guilty, and have served time in a juvenile detention center as well as youth who plead guilty and are sentenced to probation (as opposed to incarceration or detention).

youth services workers: The Foundation defined a youth worker as someone engaged in promoting the overall development of school-age children and youth ages 5–18 in any capacity other than teaching in public or private educational institutions during the regular school day, early child care, and social work/social services. (This is a definition developed by the Academy for Educational Development's Center for Youth Development and Policy Research with a coalition of youth development agencies.) Examples of youth workers are counselors, coaches, recreation workers, and school-based staff who work with youth on a day-to-day basis during nonschool hours and also include what the Department of Labor (DOL) tracks as "activity specialists" who are school-affiliated staff such as yearbook and honor society advisors, and parks and recreation staff and coaches.

For each high-risk youth prevented from adopting a life of crime, experts estimate the country saves between $1.7 and $2.3 million. *(Newman, Fox, Flynn, and Christiansen, 2000)*

employment and training workers: The Foundation included eligibility and caseworkers in income support programs like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, and Food Stamps and employment and training counselors in welfare programs. The titles and job positions in this workforce are changing as a result of welfare reform. The specific problems surrounding these changes are discussed in detail in Part Two of this paper.

Table 1, page 9, looks at data on the size of the workforce in each of the five fields we studied and summarizes what we know about salaries, turnover, training and preparation, workload, and motivation in each of these areas. The table was compiled from data drawn from the DOL, the DOL's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Current Population Survey, government administrative records, and one-time surveys by professional associations. A more detailed compilation of the data for each of the five sectors studied can be found in Tables 3-6 in Appendix One.

Table 1: A Snapshot of the Human Services Workforce

	Child Welfare	Child Care	Juvenile Justice	Youth Services	Employment & Training
Estimated Number of Frontline Workers	870,000	1.5 million in center-based and licensed family care providers	300,000	2 million (excluding seasonal workers) 4 million (including part-time workers)	500,000
Estimated Average Salary	Social Worker (Median) $30,590 Paraprofessional (Median) $21,360	$6.70/hr	$30,000	$21,628	$30,800
Estimated Average Starting Salary	$22,000		$22,000		
Estimated Average Turnover	Public Agencies 20% (Annual) Private Agencies 40% (Annual)	40%	40-80% (Lower in Nonprofits)		
Training/Preparation	B.A. required On the job training: 3 weeks for protective services 2 weeks for other jobs	Minimal Requirements	B.A. required Limited on the job training in safety/ security		Associates or Bachelors Degree Highly varied local standards
Typical Workloads	24 cases for protective services 31 cases for ongoing case management Caseloads are twice recommended standards		Probation: 41 cases/officer Recommended: 30 cases/officer		See box on Motivation immediately below.
Motivation	Reasons Workers Leave: ■ heavy workload ■ low status ■ low pay ■ poor supervision Reasons Workers Stay: ■ sense of mission ■ good fit with job ■ investment in relationships ■ professional standing	Leading Reason for Turnover: ■ Low Pay	Reasons Workers Leave: ■ inability to impact life chances of youth ■ long hours ■ high stress ■ low pay		Current survey data shows worker dissatisfaction with combined case management and eligibility determination roles under TANF

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The Challenges of Gathering Data on the Frontline Human Services Workforce

After-school programs are associated with better academic achievement and social adjustment than other types of after-school care (i.e., mother care, informal adult supervision, and self-care). *(Posner and Vandell, 1994)*

The appalling lack of data on the human services workforce makes the Foundation's initial count of 3 million frontline workers a conservative estimate, at best. Currently, there is no tracking system that counts these workers and can tell us what kinds of positions they occupy and what jobs they do. DOL—through the Current Population Survey and other BLS tracking—does count some human services workers. However, with the exception of teachers and paraprofessionals in schools, none of the occupational categories correspond with publicly funded human services delivery.

This lack of good numbers makes it apparent that the issues facing frontline workers are invisible from a data and management perspective. In addition to the lack of data, Foundation staff encountered several other problems in counting these workers. The problems in quantifying a workforce often served to underscore inherent issues challenging the workforce itself. For this reason, we will discuss some of the specific difficulties we encountered in the sectors we studied.

Child Care: Self-Employed Workers Remain Uncounted

Of all the sectors we looked at, child care was clearly the leading area where numbers have been skewed by a failure to count self-employed workers. We know that the DOL significantly undercounts all fields where there are a substantial number of self-employed workers. However, license-exempt family child care providers (who are self-employed) comprise a huge portion of this workforce and must be included in the overall picture. DOL does count child care workers in centers and those working in licensed family child care homes, but not in a way that corresponds to the jobs frontline staff actually have in practice. As a result, we have no real sense of how many people are doing this work, what roles they have, and how the services are performed.

This lack of reliable data on the child care workforce stands in sharp contrast to the well-documented benefits of good early childhood programs.

Juvenile Justice: Category Crossover Makes Tracking Difficult

Efforts to track juvenile justice workers are complicated by the many types of jobs and job functions that make up this workforce. BLS tracks adult corrections workers with a single job classification, but juvenile justice workers are counted under several categories that also include workers in other fields. For example, the classification "residential care worker" includes most workers in juvenile detention centers, although it also includes some workers in child welfare residential facilities. Although the crossover among the BLS categories makes tracking more difficult, it is not surprising as many of these workers end up doing similar jobs, or multiple jobs, in the same agencies as youth move between child welfare and juvenile justice programs.

Most juvenile justice workers are hired as frontline workers with little room to advance their careers. Even opportunities to move up the career ladder, when available, raise problems for this workforce. When a promotion takes place, the worker is often promoted to a managerial position within the unit they were originally working in, without additional training in the skills needed for this different role. Poor management and low morale are the predictable results when minimally prepared workers are suddenly supervising others who were very recently their colleagues and peers.

Data sources outside BLS that offer insight into the juvenile justice workforce include a few targeted studies, such as one conducted by the University of Michigan on Midwestern justice programs. Additionally, the Child Welfare League of America intends to expand their annual workforce survey to include compensation and turnover issues among juvenile justice workers employed by their members. Many larger nonprofit programs collect data on staff turnover and demographics within their agencies, but few are willing to share their information and risk comparison with other competing programs. Similarly, one-time surveys, usually sponsored by professional associations, are somewhat unreliable and limited in the range of issues covered.

New York City housing projects with Boys and Girls Clubs on site experienced a juvenile arrest rate that was 13 percent lower than that of similar housing projects without a club. Drug activity was 22 percent lower in projects with a club. *(Schinke, Orlandi, and Cole, 1992)*

Youth Services: Data Are Unreliable and Inaccurate

Youth services is the least documented, least understood, and probably the most varied field we studied. There is no national data set on youth workers, or on youth-serving programs. While several large, national youth-serving organizations collect data on their own programs, much of the data are unreliable and often inaccurate. Understanding this field better is made more complicated by substantial mistrust among agencies about sharing program data.

Eighth-grade students who take care of themselves after school for 11 or more hours per week are at twice the risk of substance use as those who do not take care of themselves. This relationship held at all levels of socioeconomic status, extracurricular activities, and source of social influence and stress. *(Richardson, et al., 1989)*

The best data source we found is the "Salaries and Benefits in Youth Development Agencies" study conducted by the National Assembly in 1999. It is the only study to focus specifically on youth development agencies and was motivated by the concerns of National Assembly members, particularly youth-serving agencies, about the extent of low compensation among their workforce. With a sample of 1,050 community-based agencies across the United States, the study looked at youth services jobs at all levels and categorized them by region and agency size. However, the study contains no data on demographics, training, tenure, and job satisfaction. Further, the data do not permit cross-regional comparison.

As with other sectors we studied, the lack of good information about youth workers and what they do stands in sharp contrast to the documented benefits of youth programs.

Employment and Training: Shifting Regulations Make It Impossible to Define Jobs

Welfare reform has changed the positions and titles for frontline workers. In light of this rapidly shifting picture, we can draw few conclusions about this workforce. Indeed, no data source provides a clear picture of who these workers are. For example, the Department of Labor has five job classifications pertinent to welfare and employment and each includes a wide variety of jobs and work settings. To date, there has been no effort to standardize job functions or positions. There is also no clarity on the best way to organize job functions. There is an extensive though disaggregated training industry that targets welfare workers, but there is no reliable data on how these training programs affect the skills and career advancement of welfare workers.

Several surveys currently in progress are attempting to offer a glimpse of how workers perceive their jobs and, to some extent, how these perceptions affect the services families receive. Two of those studies are multiyear efforts that we expect will tell us more about this workforce. The Rockefeller Institute of Government is studying 11 welfare offices in Georgia, Minnesota, New York, and Texas to understand how management practices influence frontline workers and their ability to meet the goals of TANF. The University of Maryland is taking a comprehensive look at that state's welfare-to-work program under TANF and includes surveys of workers and their supervisors as part of their investigation.

Child Welfare/Social Work: Lack of Consistent Attention to the Workforce Challenges

The child welfare workforce is the most personal of all the sectors we studied and arguably the most pivotal in terms of child outcomes. It is also fraught with contradictions that contribute to burnout, high turnover, and worker cynicism. Child welfare workers deal with some of the most difficult manifestations of economic disadvantage, overwhelmed families, and inadequate educational systems. Their successes are hard to measure and their failures are frequently aired on the evening news.

DOL does track social services workers, and this includes many child welfare workers, but a large number of people who perform social services functions according to DOL's definition are not employed in publicly funded child welfare services. Beyond DOL's accounting, there are a number of organizations currently focused on studying the problems of child welfare and encouraging system reform. Some of these efforts include data gathering, but much of the work is focused on compensation and attention to the range of workforce issues is intermittent. Some of the larger organizations studying the challenges to frontline social services workers are listed below:

After six Beacon Schools opened in one New York City neighborhood, increased vocational counseling and academic opportunities were credited for decreased numbers of juvenile felonies reported to the police. *(de Kanter, et al., 1997)*

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) was funded by the John A. Hartford Foundation to survey their membership and some of the data in this report is based on their findings. (The Hartford Foundation is especially concerned about the future of the social services workforce and its implications for elder care.)

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) conducts an annual salary survey of child protective services workers. In the fall of 2001, CWLA fielded a survey that addressed all workers in their membership (including juvenile justice workers) and expanded data gathering to include vacancy rates, tenure/turnover, and compensation.

The Alliance for Children and Families has surveyed their membership—mostly large nonprofit social services agencies—about compensation and intrends to gather additional data, but has no specific plans to do so.

The Chapin Hall Center for Children is fielding a survey for frontline workers in the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation's child protection initiative. Data will include a look at linkages between organization practice, motivation, and performance.

Conclusion

The data the Foundation was able to cobble together in its preliminary scan raised more questions than they answered. It is clear human services workers are invisible from a data and management perspective. Furthermore, it is apparent that this invisibility has inhibited reform and sustained a dangerous status quo.

Frontline human services workers employed by state and local government and nonprofits make less money—up to 86 percent less—than similarly qualified workers employed by the federal government for administrative functions.

Our initial research provided strong proof of the vast numbers of people who perform these difficult and caring jobs. Across the sectors we studied, we found uniformly high expectations and uniformly tough responsibilities. The large numbers and the crosscutting issues identified led us to see frontline human services as being performed by a group of defined fields that share many of the same qualities, responsibilities, and challenges. This is de facto the case, though human services delivery is not defined as an "industry." For example, the New York City Administration for Children's Services employs workers in child welfare, child care, youth services, and juvenile justice. These workers are employed by the same agency, report within the same management structure, and are subject to many of the same policies and regulations. Yet, they are not considered to be sectors that are linked in any meaningful way.

Reform efforts, too, have not defined human services as an organized sector of the workforce in a manner that calls attention to its size or recognizes the professional nature and public expectations of its work. The Foundation believes "naming" human services as a defined industry is vital in order to raise the profile of the human services sector and build support for change. We believe that clearly defining these sectors will require greater understanding of them. To this end, the Foundation has already begun to extend the work of our preliminary scan. We are under way with a national benchmark survey that will assemble the first comprehensive, data-based national profile of the human services workforce by interviewing 2,000 randomly selected frontline workers in their homes.

In social services, a human resources manager can expect to make an average of $41,000 per year. The same position pays $69,000 in the federal government for purely administrative work and $73,000 in the financial services industry.

This new work will be discussed in greater detail in Part Four of this paper. First, however, we will continue to outline our preliminary findings on the jobs performed by frontline workers and the problems they face.

part two

CHALLENGES TO THE FRONTLINE SOCIAL SERVICES WORKFORCE

As noted earlier, the large number of people who hold frontline human services jobs is deeply at odds with how little we know about them and the work they do. The Foundation's preliminary scan attempted to gather basic information about salary, turnover, training, workloads, and the factors that motivate people to do these caring, difficult jobs. The following section offers some of the basic conclusions drawn from this research and discusses the seven key problems we identified that currently challenge workers in the field and that reveal a dangerously compromised system.

1) Social Services Pays Its Workers Less than Any Other Sector That Hires Similarly Qualified People for Similar Jobs

The average annual turnover among child care teachers working in centers is 40 percent; this is also the average turnover rate for child welfare workers in private agencies.

Social services jobs at all levels consistently rank among the five worst-paying professional jobs for men and women tracked by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Indeed, social services pays its workers less than any other sector that hires similarly qualified people for similar jobs. Further, the higher up the career ladder, the worse the comparative pay gets.

Our research further revealed that market demand for human services workers does not produce upward pressure on wages. Publicly funded human services are, by definition, a market created by government and the forces driving compensation are public policy and regulation, not the laws of supply and demand.

Government Definition of the Market Inhibits Reform: Case in Point—Child Care

With a highly unstable low-wage workforce, child care, perhaps more than any other field the Foundation studied, presents the clearest example of how low pay compromises quality care and better results for kids. Child care also presents the clearest solution, as wage increases are clearly linked to reduced turnover, better program quality, and better outcomes.

Two forces, however, stand in the way of change. The first is the nature of the market for child care services: While the cost of improving the quality of child care is relatively modest —better quality child care costs an average of 10 percent more than mediocre care— there is no incentive to do so as consumers are generally unwilling to pay more. This is in part because parents consistently, and vastly, overestimate the quality of care currently provided to their kids.

The second barrier relates to conflicting public policy. On the one hand, the federal government invests in numerous workforce programs that emphasize the expansion of child care slots to the exclusion of investments to boost the quality of child care. This approach has become more widespread since the implementation of new work requirements under TANF and the resulting increased need for child care assistance among women leaving welfare for work. However, the Department of Health and Human Services also sets policy for early childhood education that stresses improvements in child care quality, emphasizing staff training and other program enhancements while paying little attention to meeting demands for increased supply.

With the government working at cross currents, child care is left with an acute shortage of workers and a poorly compensated workforce. At the same time, demand for child care continues to grow. It is estimated that 69 percent of families consist of a single parent or two parents who work full-time; nearly all of them will require some form of child care. Currently, there are numerous efforts to increase wages indirectly through training for frontline child care workers. However, there are few instances of efforts to increase wages directly or to build career ladders in a field where wages are low even for more highly skilled positions in teaching and administration.

In real terms, social services earnings went up 6 percent over the 12 years from 1988–2000. In the same period, the wages in security and commodity services went up 23 percent, data processing went up 22 percent, and business services went up 13 percent.

2) High Turnover Results in Negative Impacts on Kids and Families

Frontline work in human services is about relationships. Workers are not interchangeable parts, and a child or family suffers when caseworkers don't know how to help, or when they leave and are replaced by new, inexperienced workers. We know that just staying in their jobs continuously is an essential element of workers' effectiveness. We also know the consequences of high turnover; for example, families with children in foster care are less likely to be reunited in a timely way and children in child care centers show slower development.

3) Poor Training and Preparation Means Many Workers Fail to Measure Up

Undergraduate students who intend to become teachers score among the lowest on the SAT—964 out of a possible 1,600. The national average is 1,016.

Across all human services sectors, we found that those in frontline jobs are often lower-achieving graduates, who have received little job-related preparation adequate to the task. In addition, most frontline jobs provide little in the way of on-site training or ancillary support. We know that the best-run systems don't produce results if the people who do the work are poorly trained, inexperienced, or overwhelmed. Workers have little incentive to stay and develop skills when they are poorly paid and when their supervisors have to spend most of their time overseeing compliance with administrative procedures rather than teaching and supporting their staff.

4) Labor Market Trends Are Not Good

The difficulty in retaining qualified staff will soon be further complicated by an unprecedented wave of Baby Boom retirements from public service predicted for the years ahead. Currently there is no strategy for replacing these workers. Forty percent of social workers (as defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics) are over the age of 45, compared to a third of the U.S. workforce overall. And 42 percent of the 16 million people working in state and local government in 1999 were eligible for retirement.

5) The Nation's Best Graduates Do Not See a Future for Themselves in Human Services

There is growing evidence that human services work has become a destination of last choice for talented young people. A telephone survey of liberal arts and social work majors, conducted in April 2002 by Princeton Survey Research Associates on behalf of the Brookings Institution's Center for Public Service, revealed that only 21 percent of graduating seniors gave serious consideration to pursuing work in child care, child welfare, juvenile justice, youth services, and employment and training services. The level of interest was even lower for graduating seniors at the nation's top 100 colleges and universities where only 17 percent of seniors indicated interest in pursuing these jobs.

For those students who did express interest in these fields, most perceived these jobs as hard to find and said they expected the entry process to be confusing and slow. Further, most interested graduates indicated that they expected human services to offer rewarding work and the opportunity for professional growth—a demand that cannot be satisfied under the current conditions of frontline human services work.

At the heart of high-quality child care is the nature of interaction between children and caregivers. Research shows that children develop best if relationships with their caregivers are warm, supportive, responsive, and cognitively stimulating. Stability of care is also important, as it is hard to form sustained relationships if caregivers come and go. *(Zaslow and Tout 49, 2002)*

6) Scant Support and Heavy Workloads Foster a Perception That These Jobs Are Not Valued

Frontline human services jobs are hard. The need for good judgment under conditions of uncertainty is emotionally draining for even the most skilled worker. Workers often feel vulnerable and insecure about their responsibility. Indeed, the consequences of a mistake can include irreparable damage to a worker's professional reputation, public humiliation, and disciplinary action or firing.

The human services sector as a whole suffers from low public confidence. Anecdotal and survey data suggest that even among public service workers, human services workers are held in particularly low regard. For example, in surveys of child welfare workers leaving their jobs, "not feeling valued" is consistently one of the top three reasons cited for departure. We found high turnover in all these jobs, a factor that is affected by and reinforces the negative features of low pay, little opportunity, and heavy workloads.

7) Excessive Regulation and Lack of Flexibility Cause Workers to Leave the Field

Rule-bound, compliance-oriented jobs create a vicious cycle. On one hand, good workers who want some degree of autonomy will not stay in them. On the other hand, poor-quality staff are subjected to overregulation in a last-ditch effort to manage them. Though regulations are intended to build in accountability and ensure a base level of good practice, they fix the process into a one-size-fits-all intervention, ignore results, and are indifferent to high performance. In addition, such regulation constricts flexibility and inhibits opportunity for professional recognition and career advancement.

Excessive regulation, particularly in the fields of child welfare, juvenile justice, and income maintenance, is a consistent feature of work life and routinely cited as a leading reason why workers leave their jobs.

Overregulation Confuses and Discourages Workers: Case in Point—Welfare Reform

According to the Educational Testing Service, students taking the GRE to prepare for graduate work in education score worse than students intending to study any other field.

The passage of welfare reform legislation raises a unique set of issues for the employment and training workforce and for welfare workers in particular. These issues will be discussed in detail here, as they highlight some of the general problems that government reforms pose for the human services workforce and because welfare reform underscores the vital role that frontline workers will play in this reform. Indeed, it is not a stretch to say that the success of welfare reform depends heavily on the frontline workers who manage and deliver these new services, how they interpret their new jobs, and how well they do these jobs.

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program has redefined the frontline work that previously characterized the income maintenance/eligibility benefits determination job. Once limited to impersonal clerical functions, frontline caseworkers are now expected to be experts in self-sufficiency and social work: to engage in a more personalized conversation about clients' lives, to plan services leading to and supporting employment, to find employment, and to monitor clients' performance—all while continuing with their former responsibilities for determining eligibility for TANF, Medicaid, and Food Stamps.

Reflecting the expanded nature of these jobs, most welfare agencies have changed the titles of their frontline workers from terms like "eligibility specialist" to the more encompassing and professional-sounding "case manager." However, workers have been given little guidance as to what these new titles really mean. Even as states are adding responsibilities to the frontline welfare worker's job, they have done little to prepare their frontline workers with the kinds of skills needed to foster this self-sufficiency. The result is a workforce that feels unprepared, overwhelmed, and reluctant to get involved in clients' personal problems.

Further complicating matters, the public agencies do not have clarity on job priorities. For example, formal accountability in eligibility determination and low error rates are still key fiscal issues (as the federal government still sanctions states for mistakes). Thus, frontline workers devote considerable time—and report considerable pressure from management—to collect and verify the documents necessary for clients' receipt of benefits. This stands in contrast to new policy pressures on states (and workers) to show results in the form of clients placed in jobs and off of welfare.

New teachers who score higher on the SAT are twice as likely to leave.

One study led by the Rockefeller Institute of Government of 11 welfare offices under TANF found that workers were uniformly unhappy with the expanded roles and expectations. Another study of Maryland welfare offices observed that many welfare workers took the job because they were attracted to the rule- and paper-oriented nature of eligibility work and find it difficult to take on the counseling and coaching roles now expected of them.

It is unclear what impact such confusion and lack of preparation will have on kids and families. We do know that workers' confusion about their roles and what matters most to their superiors—eligibility determinations with few mistakes or getting clients into jobs—results in widely varied frontline practice, from the nature and length of client assessments, to the information and help clients receive, to how workers spend their time.

The study of Maryland welfare offices found that the length of a client's assessment varied from five minutes to an entire day; clearly suggesting some were primarily about eligibility for benefits while others were a more comprehensive discussion of client strengths and needs. The 11-site Rockefeller study found that welfare workers rarely mentioned

basic elements of the TANF package, such as the fact that states ignore part of earnings when calculating benefits—a key work incentive—or the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). When they did explain these policies, workers usually failed to describe them fully or accurately. A recent study by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) confirmed this pattern in the failure of workers to describe Food Stamp and Medicaid benefits available to families after leaving welfare.

Demand for workers is expected to exceed supply. For example, BLS estimates a 41 percent increase in the number of social services jobs from 1998–2008 (15 percent growth is projected for U.S. industries overall). Part of this reflects growing number of elderly expected to require care.

These problems are not isolated to a few overwhelmed and disorganized welfare offices—a recent survey by the Urban Institute found that only 40 percent of eligible families leaving welfare continued to receive Food Stamps. In summary, while the effects of welfare reform are still unclear, the expanded responsibilities, lack of preparation, and confusion about priorities will likely impair the welfare workforce's ability to meet the new requirements of their jobs and will compromise the services received by vulnerable children and their families.

Conclusion

Our preliminary survey of frontline human services sectors revealed a host of problems and challenges. The most prevalent have been discussed above, and there are many more that warrant examination. However, our aim in this paper is not to document the problems exhaustively but to identify the most chronically cited issues. These are the issues that we will look at most closely in the benchmark survey and other explorations now under way. This examination of focused and crosscutting problems has, to our knowledge, never been undertaken before, and we believe that this approach will help us to both clarify the problems and find examples of places where efforts are being made to address them. To this end, we have identified eight fundamental problems that cripple all human services sectors.

1) Nonprofit, government, and for-profit employers cannot find sufficient numbers of quality staff

2) When they do, too many of those workers do not stay

3) Workers are paid less than those in other jobs at comparable levels

4) There is limited opportunity for professional growth and advancement

5) Workers receive poor supervision and little guidance or support

6) Rule-bound jobs leave little latitude for discretion and drive out the most entrepreneurial workers

7) The education and training these workers receive do not match the role and demands actually required by the jobs they hold

8) Workers receive no reward for skills or extra effort

1998–2008 BLS projections are for 36 percent growth in the number of social workers. This is a 3 percent annual growth rate, compared to 1 percent annual growth for the U.S. workforce overall.

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part three

HOW TO IMPROVE FRONTLINE HUMAN SERVICES DELIVERY

According to BLS, social services is one of the fastest growing industries in the United States and paraprofessional human services workers are the ninth fastest growing occupational group.

Despite the lack of good statistical data about frontline workers and the significant problems that compromise delivery, the Foundation's preliminary study yielded many positive examples of "best practices" that attempt to address the shortfalls and bring about reform. Of particular interest to us were the strategies that produce the attributes of a service system that can get and keep the kinds of workers we need. To these ends, we found two recurring themes in our research. The first is that a stable, motivated, and prepared workforce achieves better outcomes. The second is that workers identify issues of support, respect, training, and respite as critical factors in job satisfaction. In some cases, these factors are placed ahead of or on par with increased compensation.

In the following section, we discuss these basic conclusions as well as the leading strategies, specific approaches, and examples of demonstrated success that give us confidence that change is possible and, in many cases, already under way.

Basic Conclusions

At the outset of our research, we believed, intuitively, that families achieve better outcomes when assisted by a frontline workforce that is stable, motivated, prepared, and supported. While we were initially uncertain that our research would bear this out, we were pleased to find examples in several sectors that attest to this assumption.

child welfare: Two studies suggest that both organizational climate and working conditions for frontline staff make a difference for clients. Specifically, organizations that provided frontline workers with supportive supervision and manageable caseloads reunited

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more families. Additionally, frontline workers who had clear roles, the authority to make decisions, and the flexibility to use their judgment had caseloads with significantly higher-functioning children.

Other studies indicated that child welfare workers are often motivated by a sense of personal mission and the desire to help kids. For these self-motivated workers, basic job support and recognition make a significant difference in job satisfaction. Stress and burnout were alleviated when workplaces set realistic performance expectations and provided professional development opportunities, flexible schedules, respite, and part-time or job-sharing schedules.

child care: Several studies over time have documented that better compensation reduces turnover among child care workers. Further, the very fact of greater stability among early childhood teachers produces higher levels of social and cognitive functioning among children in their care. This means that simply being able to retain the same teachers, with all their strengths and limitations, benefits kids.

There is also evidence that program quality (for which there is a widely shared generic definition) contributes to higher levels of child functioning. Two factors have been documented to produce program quality in child care and both have to do with the characteristics of child care workers. The first and most important is the presence of enthusiastic and motivated professionals. The second is the presence of professionals trained in early childhood education.[1]

Asked in a 2000 Harris Poll which careers offer the greatest potential for their children and students, only 11 percent of parents and 24 percent of high school teachers interviewed said government was the place to go.

Several rigorous surveys and analyses conducted over the years by the Center for the Child Care Workforce, the University of Denver, the University of California at Berkeley, and others have provided a richer picture of workforce issues and have served to focus attention on the crucial link between compensation, quality, and child outcomes.

juvenile justice: Long hours, high stress, and low pay all contribute to high turnover and burnout among frontline juvenile justice workers. Further, most workers report wanting to effectively assist youth but lacking the skills or resources necessary to do so. This felt inability to "make a difference" is a leading cause of low motivation, as well as high turnover.

[1]Despite the documented benefits of improved quality, one study of child care centers found that seven in ten provided mediocre care, and one in eight threatened the health and safety of kids.

A variety of strategies have been used to keep good staff and combat worker burnout, especially among nonprofit juvenile justice programs. Interestingly, the majority of efforts do not seek to improve working conditions or the worker, but provide opportunities for staff to get away from their jobs for a while, as most initiatives revolve around allowances for sabbatical or other leave. Scattered other programs offer performance-based salary bonuses, tuition reimbursement, and training. However, we know of no data on the effectiveness of any of these approaches for enhancing recruitment, reducing turnover, improving program quality, or benefiting youth.

youth services: While we found no specific evidence of reforms that yielded workplace improvements in the youth services sector, one survey of youth workers indicated that professional tools and career incentives would make a great difference in job satisfaction. Workers expressed a need for better salaries and benefits, but also for more opportunities for professional growth, improved public understanding of youth services, increased parental involvement, continuing education, better training, and more interaction with colleagues in other agencies to reduce a sense of isolation suffered by many in the field. Overall, these workers said they wanted support systems that would enable them to work better and more efficiently instead of harder and longer.

The federal government runs dead last as the destination of choice for graduates of the top public policy and administration graduate schools.

The survey further stressed the importance of support, recognition, and appreciation for youth services work. Workers reported that parents and others in their community did not understand the positive and preventive value of youth development and often treated them more like babysitters than professionals.

Leading Strategies

From our survey of the frontline workforce, we concluded that currently deployed strategies for change tend to cluster in three areas:

1) **REWARDING INCUMBENT WORKERS.** This includes enhancing compensation (sometimes through performance-based mechanisms), increasing worker recognition and status, offering career opportunities, and providing flexible work schedules that help balance work and family obligations. Flexible schedules are a leading concern for caseworkers whose clients may require their attention at any hour of the day or night.

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2) OFFERING MANAGERS THE DISCRETION TO CREATE A MISSION-DRIVEN ORGANIZATION. Changes in organizational structure and outlook are as important as those changes that address individual worker needs. Here, successful strategies include creating a sense of belonging to an organization with a commonly held mission, forming clear goals, and offering workers greater latitude and discretion in achieving those goals.

3) INCREASING THE EASE AND APPEAL OF HIRING. Human services hiring practices are typically described as confusing and slow. Improvement strategies include deploying faster, friendlier, and more efficient approaches and creating a more selective, higher-status recruitment program to attract a higher-quality worker.

Social work school enrollment is down: 7 percent for BA degrees between 1994–98 and down 5 percent for MSWs during the same period.

Specific Approaches

Many jurisdictions offered us examples of approaches that were being successfully used. The approaches being used with greatest frequency are described below.

1) BROADBANDING CIVIL SERVICE TITLES. This collapses narrow job classifications into job categories that encompass a wider range of pay options and allows an agency to provide merit raises without promotion to a new title.

2) PAY DIFFERENTIALS FOR ON-CALL WORK, LONGEVITY, OR MERIT.

3) FLEX-TIME OR SWING SHIFTS THAT LET WORKERS BETTER ACCOMMODATE FAMILY LIFE.

4) CAREER ADVANCEMENT BY ADDING NEW RUNGS TO JOB LADDERS THAT RECOGNIZE SENIORITY AND PERFORMANCE.

5) LINKING INCREASED COMPENSATION TO INCREASED TRAINING.

6) FLEXIBILITY TO HIRE AND KEEP ONLY THE BEST STAFF.

7) MORE TIMELY HIRING BY LIMITING OR ELIMINATING CIVIL SERVICE TESTING, and by creating online job applications, weekly announcements of openings, and five-day windows for job applications.

Demonstrated Success in Specific Sectors

The workload for the average child welfare worker is twice the number of cases recommended by the Child Welfare League of America.

Several human services fields report that implementation of the approaches previously described has led to reduced turnover and better outcomes.

child welfare: Child welfare managers report that the use of flex-time and swing shifts boosts worker morale and helps them address one of the leading reasons child welfare workers give for wanting to quit—the difficulty of balancing work and family. A variety of salary enhancements and career ladder initiatives have also helped stem turnover.

child care: Evidence from the field of child care clearly points to low wages as the leading problem in staff turnover and program quality. Further, we noted earlier that increased compensation for all frontline workers reduces turnover and correlates with better results for kids. Program quality is also linked to better child outcomes. Here, we found that one of the most powerful influences on program quality is staff trained in early childhood education.

> The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) delivers the largest and best child care program in the country. While DOD benefits from a "captive" labor market of military spouses, its success is also clearly linked to the fact that DOD treats teachers like soldiers, giving them the training and equipment they need:
>
> - All frontline staff are required to complete an 18-month training and certification program.
> - Seventy-five percent of DOD's child care centers are certified, compared to 7 percent nationally.
> - Child care services are heavily subsidized; the average annual cost to a family is $3,400.

Workforce improvement strategies that work in child care are focused on increasing compensation and rewarding additional training. For example, federal salary pass-throughs in Head Start and the Child Care and Development Block Grant earmark funds specifically for teacher salary increases—a strategy found to reduce turnover that, in turn, improves child outcomes. Other strategies include unionization drives (in Seattle and Philadelphia);

health insurance coverage for workers (Rhode Island); and worker cooperatives, where staff share in revenue gains (Philadelphia). No organization monitors, tracks, or promotes these scattered but promising efforts.

employment and training: The employment and training field is cluttered with a variety of programs designed to prepare welfare workers and other employment specialists to do their jobs. The federal government alone sponsors five such programs; there are a half dozen high-caliber programs at universities and another five extensive efforts sponsored by professional associations. We have no evidence suggesting the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of any of these programs.

The changes in welfare office priorities have been so recent that there is little information on efforts to improve how frontline workers do their new job. The various ways in which states opt to implement these new responsibilities do offer some natural experiments in better ways to organize this work. Two findings emerge: 1) lowering or limiting workers' caseloads serves both to reduce error rates and provide time for workers to address the eligibility and self-sufficiency dimensions of their work with clients; and 2) defining specialized roles for frontline staff, rather than more extensive ones, creates a more motivated workforce that makes fewer mistakes.

Youth workers surveyed in a 1999 Indiana Youth Institute study cited lack of respect, lack of recognition, and lack of parental support as key frustrations in their work.

youth services: Although we know little about youth workers and what makes them effective, several national organizations are active in program development and staff training, as well as influencing policy around program financing. These include the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research at the Academy for Educational Development, the National Institute on Out-of-School Time, the Forum—led by Karen Pittman—and the National Assembly. In addition, some of the largest nonprofit service providers in the country, such as Boys and Girls Clubs of America and Big Brothers/Big Sisters, are primarily youth-serving organizations. Funders who have a history of investment in youth services include the Mott Foundation and the DeWitt Wallace-Readers Digest Funds.

Overall, our study of relevant innovations in public systems has thus far identified 148 city-, county-, or state-run service delivery agencies that reportedly deploy one or more of the changes we have identified to build a better workforce. Many jurisdictions deploy more than one of the practices we studied. The number of unique jurisdictions, excluding

The regulations governing practice in child welfare, juvenile justice, and income maintenance in New York State are the equivalent length of five volumes of *War and Peace*.

those listed in more than one category, is 80. Twenty-two of these efforts include human services agencies in at least one of the innovative practices reported.

Table 2, below, summarizes the preliminary list of sites we found and the broad categories of management strategies being deployed at those sites. This list reflects the findings of the Foundation's preliminary scan. As we prepare this paper, we have already identified more sites and uncovered more promising practices and will be at liberty to offer them as examples in early 2003.

Table 2: A Preliminary List of Public Systems with Promising Practices

Management Strategy	Location
Faster Hiring	States: Alabama, Iowa, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, South Carolina, Virginia, and Wisconsin Counties/Cities: 20
Broadbanding (flexible compensation and staff deployment)	States: Idaho, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, South Carolina, West Virginia, and Wyoming Counties/Cities: 8
Performance Management (clear expectations, measurable objectives)	States: Washington Counties/Cities: 7
Training and Professional Development	States: Rhode Island, Iowa, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, and Virginia Counties/Cities: 17
Quality of Work Life Improvements	States: Connecticut, Kansas, and Wisconsin Counties/Cities: 25
Workforce Planning (anticipating and responding to staff shortages)	States: Kansas Counties/Cities: 10
Compensation (including pay-for-performance)	States: Alaska, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Montana, and Oklahoma Counties/Cities: 18

Conclusion

The Foundation's preliminary scan revealed several strategies and approaches for recruiting and keeping good frontline workers. We find it notable that although some of these approaches fall into clear categories, no one strategy stands out and none purport to offer a single "silver bullet" solution. Indeed, the problem of frontline human services delivery needs to be approached in multiple ways, with strategies geared toward the needs and

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dynamics of the various frontline sectors. While this broad-based approach may seem daunting, the Foundation believes that the opportunity such an approach offers significantly outweighs its attendant challenges. Different approaches mean that different organizations, with different areas of expertise, can work together on the problem. Furthermore, a broad number of stakeholders will serve to widen the potential political base for reform and encourage bipartisan appeal for measures implemented. To give just one example attesting to this possibility, the pay-for-performance program in Hamilton County, Ohio, that bases raises on merit and achievement might traditionally have been identified as a conservative approach. However, in the last four years that it has been implemented, pay-for-performance has been retained in every union contract renegotiation cycle. This is a sign that both labor and management are satisfied with the program. It also means that the program is likely to continue to be in place long enough to show whether such strategies yield measurable improvements. Such examples reinforce our belief that the Foundation will be able to galvanize broad support for frontline workforce reform.

A survey of employment and training workers in Michigan's welfare-to-work agency found that 70 percent of a worker's time is spent on paperwork.

Going forward, the Foundation's human services workforce agenda will look closely at the following eight workplace improvement strategies. These eight strategies surfaced frequently in our preliminary research as producing system attributes that have a real chance of recruiting and holding quality frontline workers.

FLEXIBILITY and freedom to recruit for the skills needed by the work to be done

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT opportunities on the job

REASONABLE WORKLOADS that let workers deploy their skills

CAREER PATHS that build on workers' skills rather than moving them "up and out"

ADEQUATE BASE COMPENSATION that can help stem turnover

CLEAR PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS that relate to a coherent organizational mission

REWARDS FOR SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE and effectiveness

ABILITY TO CHANGE BAD MANAGEMENT and supervision

part four

THE FOUNDATION'S ROLE IN FRONTLINE WORKFORCE REFORM

Child welfare workers report higher rates of family reunification and higher levels of functioning in organizations providing wider latitude for discretionary judgment and greater supervisory support.

The Foundation's initial research revealed the lack of hard data on frontline human services workers and underscored the importance of such data to effectively define these sectors and call attention to their problems. The information we were able to gather has provided a general picture of the factors inhibiting good service delivery and a preliminary sense of the "best practices" that have been effective in improving both delivery and outcomes.

However, in order to bring about real and widespread change to the frontline human services workforce, it will be necessary to extend our general and preliminary understanding and gather the kind of quantifiable, yet nuanced, data that is the cornerstone of sound public policy. The Foundation's next step in addressing the challenges facing frontline human services delivery will be: 1) to gather data that will better define these sectors; 2) to raise the profile of this issue; 3) to promote confidence in the possibility of change; and 4) to generate momentum for policy reform and practical implementation.

Further Data Gathering

A Better Definition of the Human Services Workforce

The centerpiece of our work going forward is a national benchmark survey of frontline human services workers to thoroughly assess the state of the profession and identify critical factors that can be used for ongoing tracking. This includes as full a count as possible of workers as well as qualitative data on the jobs they do and challenges they face.

As part of this survey, the Foundation is generating data on workforce demographics that address six areas of primary concern:

- motivations for joining or staying in the profession
- job satisfaction/organizational trust/compensation
- personal work histories/intentions to stay or leave
- workload pressures/perspectives on families and kids served
- other working conditions/access to resources/information/training
- views of past and potential reform

Some of the key questions we will ask include: What motivates people to do this work? For those who stay, what factors keep them in their jobs? How can systems improve their effectiveness by increasing continuity and tenure on the frontlines? How can the role of supervisors and managers be changed to break the cycle of overregulation that inhibits worker autonomy? What kinds of training, salaries, benefits, and working conditions are needed to attract and retain strong frontline workers and supervisors? What are the successful elements of skill-based training? And how can supervisors' roles be strengthened to ensure that they have the skills and the time to coach their staff for stronger practice?

This survey is currently under way and we expect to have data from it available in early 2003.

A U.S. General Accounting Office study of privatization in child support enforcement found that all of the difference in performance between public and for-profit providers is explained by pay-for-performance practices and the discretion to fire bad managers—both of which improve results.

Understanding Career Choices and Worker Retention on the Frontline

To better understand what draws people to this work, why they stay, and what makes them leave, we will track workers' paths into and out of the profession by identifying workers who have left human services work. In addition, we will interview those who currently hold frontline jobs.

A survey of graduating college students who have expressed interest in public service will allow us to assess the inclination toward this work among the current generation of students. Further, interviewing honors students will give us a sense of whether the best among the nation's graduates see a future for themselves in human services.

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We know that human services is fighting a talent war that it cannot win without significant changes in how it recruits, develops, and rewards its workers. We will study issues of hiring and volunteering to expose students to potential careers and will look at new hires' expectations in terms of job satisfaction, professional opportunities, and compensation.

We expect that we will need to disaggregate national data to understand local or regional variation in workforce dynamics and its implications for our agenda. For example, we anticipate finding significant differences across the country in how these labor markets function, who they attract, what keeps workers at these jobs, and what causes them to leave.

This work will be released in early 2003.

Identifying Best Practices and the Reform Efforts We Should Support

In addition to closely studying frontline human services working conditions, we will expand our preliminary study of practices that are yielding improvements. Our initial findings about promising practice led us to conclude that: 1) change is possible and, in some places, already under way; and 2) that particular policies and management strategies can make a difference. This means that we know the search for solutions is worthwhile and that we have a good sense of what to look for as we go forward.

Better quality child care costs an average of 10 percent more than mediocre care.
(Helburn, et al., 1995)

However, what we don't know yet is the full range of best practices the Foundation should be promoting and supporting. Further, we don't know where those practices are being deployed, their impact, and what it takes to expand or adapt them to other systems and jurisdictions.

To answer these questions, the Foundation will cast a wide net and look at diverse employment sectors to learn how they use the promising strategies we've identified (as well as others) to recruit and hold quality frontline workers. The sectors we are studying are public service delivery systems in human services and other fields, private companies, and nonprofit organizations.

Lessons from the Public Sector

In this research, we intend to probe deeper to learn more about five issues:

- how innovating jurisdictions or organizations developed and successfully implemented change
- the impact of these innovations on line staff, supervisors, clients, stakeholders, and other measures of effectiveness and efficiency
- the factors that will both assist and impede human services systems from adapting exemplary practices
- the feasibility of adapting and institutionalizing these innovations in human services systems
- strategies to support the adaptation of these practices in human services systems

Centers that pay higher wages attract better quality teaching staff. For teaching staff that have no college education, a higher wage rate has been associated with higher quality. A $1 hourly increase in wages for these staff brought about a significant increase in quality of care. *(Roditti 294, 2000)*

Lessons from the Private Sector

Our preliminary research in the private sector has revealed that workplace environment factors such as good management, recognition, career ladders, staff development, and mutual respect are the leading reasons employees cite for staying in a position. Going forward, we anticipate learning more from textured case studies of a few individual companies with relevant experience. This will help us to identify a full range of corporate practices for purposes of replication in the public sector.

While private companies do not face the same challenges as government when it comes to faster and more flexible hiring, compensation, and recognition of performance, we have identified some corporations that seem to tackle the challenges of staff motivation, retention, and professional development in ways that are instructive to human services. We are scanning for other examples from which we can learn. A preliminary list of the companies we are studying can be found in Appendix Two.

Raising the Profile of the Frontline Human Services Workforce

Although we are still at a relatively early stage in our study of the human services workforce, we believe it is important to use the knowledge that has been gathered to promote support for our agenda. We see three strands in our efforts going forward:

- Building awareness of the problem
- Demonstrating the possibility of change
- Investing in and promoting reform

Building Awareness of the Problem

The Foundation has already begun to build awareness among policy groups and organizations that share our concerns. We have also approached policy advocates and journalists to help disseminate the data we are in the process of gathering.

In South Carolina, the state government collapsed 2,200 job classifications into 500, allowing managers to recognize and reward quality without promoting workers out of the jobs where they are doing well.

A more significant public awareness strategy that we are considering is the formation (in early 2004) of a national commission on frontline human services workforce improvement. We have seen national commissions effectively used to generate new policy ideas, to educate the public, to build popular support for programs, and to mobilize constituencies to take action around an issue. While all of these objectives are of interest to us, the Foundation's primary goal in sponsoring a commission would be to advance an actionable agenda of policy recommendations that realistically address the challenges of the human services workforce and initiate a process of reform that is long overdue.

In considering the option of forming a national commission, the Foundation informally studied national policy commissions to gain a sense of the circumstances under which they are most effective. In brief, we learned that timing and focus are critical success factors. We learned that there are two points in a "policy cycle" in which a commission is probably most useful: 1) when an issue is not yet on the public agenda; and 2) when a policy issue has been derailed by conflicting positions on how to resolve it and leadership

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is required. Currently, the challenges facing frontline human services workers are decidedly not issues on the public agenda, making this a potentially optimal time to use a commission to develop policy.

On the other hand, we note that the most successful commissions were ones that have been able to frame four or five clear policy recommendations. While we believe that our short list of such recommendations will become clear, we do not yet have enough information on the human services workforce to frame the kind of focused and data-based policies that will have broad implementation and lasting effect. The Foundation's national survey and explorations of on-the-ground best practices are critical in assembling this kind of data. As this work progresses, we will continue to evaluate the utility of a commission to further our goals of awareness building and policymaking.

In Wisconsin, 95 percent of managers in state government say broadbanding has improved the state's ability to recruit and retain qualified staff.

Our research on national policy commissions has enabled us to assemble a first-ever best practice "how-to" guide for managing and deploying successful policy commissions, which is available on the Foundation's website. If the Foundation chooses to invest in a national commission, we believe the work we have done studying commissions will position us to be an effective sponsor of such an effort.

Demonstrating the Possibility of Change

To make any progress with our reform efforts, the Foundation must convince decisionmakers and the public at large that reform is indeed possible. The research we have conducted to identify best practices has already assembled numerous examples of initiatives that demonstrate such possibility. As a next step, we intend to invest in places that are actively resolving workforce challenges. To do this, we will selectively support, publicize, and evaluate efforts to implement management strategies that recruit and keep a quality workforce. This will involve research and analysis of the results of these improvements to determine whether these examples of innovation yield measurable, significant impact.

One important point our research has shown is that there is no one approach to resolve frontline workforce problems. Indeed, a variety of approaches and service reforms can make a difference. This point serves us well as reforms have a greater likelihood of being

implemented when the constituency implementing them believes that the steps to be taken are under their control. Such confidence is more likely with a range of reform approaches than with one "silver bullet."

Investing In and Promoting Reform

Sustainable reform efforts require investment. Below, we outline four key areas of investment without which, we believe, changes in the conditions of the human services workforce cannot be achieved. In each of these areas, we have the advantage of building on the Foundation's experience deploying similar strategies in other arenas.

Hamilton County, Ohio, implemented a pay-for-performance program in 1995. Each program office can distribute funds on a discretionary basis depending on employee evaluations. Since 1998, pay-for-performance has been retained in every renegotiated union contract, a sign that both labor and management are satisfied with the program.

PROVIDING TECHNICAL SUPPORT: We plan to provide technical support to jurisdictions working to redirect their human services systems. The Foundation has learned the benefits of technical support in previous initiatives. And our research on workforce improvement practices has given us specific examples of the benefits of technical support and the way in which it sustains improvement.

SUPPORTING BEST PRACTICE MODELS: We have learned that much can be gained from modest investments in best practice sites. The Foundation's early investment in Beacon Schools, for example, helped to build the staff and capacity at these model after-school programs to respond to visits and inquiries from other jurisdictions seeking to replicate their success.

PUBLICIZING OUR FINDINGS: Dissemination of our findings is critical to building support for our efforts. We have learned that educating the messenger is an effective way for the Foundation to get its message out. Part of this education is already being accomplished through the Casey Journalism Center and its connections to media concerned with the healthy development of children and families. For this initiative, however, we believe it will be beneficial to apply this "messenger education" to a wider pool of journalists, including those who cover urban issues, social policy, and the "labor beat." As part of our education effort, we will consider strategies such as supporting educational travel, conferences, and site visits to introduce reporters to approaches and organizations that illustrate and achieve meaningful impact for kids and families.

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RECOGNIZING ACHIEVEMENT: Another approach to promoting reform is an awards program to recognize and make visible best practices and leadership. The Foundation has experience with this approach through our FAMILIES COUNT: The National Honors program. Other organizations report using such awards programs with great effectiveness.

Conclusion

Children do well when their families do well and families do well when the social support structures around them are stable and strong. For the vulnerable children the Casey Foundation is dedicated to helping, frontline workers are a critical link to social services they badly need and to opportunities for a better life. Yet the frontline human services workforce currently in place offers neither strength nor stability. Kids are being let down and the structures set up to support them are doing more harm than good, while they waste millions of taxpayer dollars.

What do frontline human services workers need to achieve the strength and stability to do their jobs right and offer vulnerable children real help? The Foundation began asking this question a year ago when we undertook our preliminary scan of the human services sector. And we will continue to ask this question as the cornerstone of our policy reform agenda going forward. We are currently putting the question to frontline workers in order to understand the quantifiable and nuanced problems that are causing them to leave the field while a new generation shows little interest in a career in human services. We are putting the question to managers, supervisors, and agencies to understand the systemic problems that keep this area overregulated and inflexible while a lack of training and support leaves workers relatively unsupervised. We are soliciting answers from jurisdictions that have made reform efforts, particularly those who have seen measurable success, in order to develop a sense of what kinds of reforms we should target and how to build support for these efforts. And we are asking for help from other stakeholders in this important system reform effort, from organizations that share the Foundation's concerns and are dedicated to helping kids.

Ventura County, California, recruits clerical staff from the ranks of county government clerks, receptionists, and community workers. The county offers free training, flexible work schedules, and education benefits to those who commit to become social workers (including protective services work). The county has managed to fill all of its vacancies (probably unprecedented in the state) and has found that staff recruited this way stay longer.

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Los Angeles County's HR Department analyzed turnover data to create a five-year forecasting plan that focuses on retention, employee development, and recruitment. Central HR works with individual departments to develop and implement practices to address unique retention, development, or recruitment issues.

In going forward with a policy reform initiative of this size and ambition, the Foundation believes it is important to cast a wide net to solicit as much insight as we can into the problems facing frontline human services workers. Yet as we assemble a more comprehensive picture than has been available to reformers in the past, we need to be careful not to become mired in studying the problem. Indeed, the Foundation's goal is to continuously direct and refine our questions so that the answers we get are not merely possibilities, but are used to build a platform for actionable policy.

It is the Foundation's intention to move as quickly as we can toward making policy. Our research efforts currently under way will be released in early 2003 and, as we have done in this paper, we will publish our findings to keep the public abreast of our work and build a greater profile for this area. Right now, the conditions of frontline human services jobs create a serious shortfall between the kind of workers we have and ones who can effectively and compassionately address the enormous problems of vulnerable children and their families. We need to build momentum for this issue, to place it in the public consciousness, to address the needs of workers who are struggling to do a good job in a tough system, and to restore public confidence that frontline human services can and will carry out the vital work with which they have been entrusted.

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a p p e n d i x o n e

HUMAN SERVICES WORKFORCE—SECTOR-SPECIFIC PROFILES

Table 3:	Profile of the Child Welfare Workforce
Estimated Number of Frontline Workers	870,000
Demographics	72% Female
Training	Average pre-service training for protective services workers (CPS): 3 weeks For other frontline hires: 2 weeks Federal funding via 426b of the Social Security Act provides education and training for workers in child welfare or those committed to the field, as well as funding for technical assistance 1980 survey of 426b trainees found 59% in child welfare related work
Estimated Average Salary	Social worker median: $30,590 Paraprofessional median: $21,360 Mean public salary CPS: $33,400 Mean public salary, Non-CPS: $32,900 Mean private salary, CPS: $28,700 Mean private salary, Non-CPS: 29,200
Estimated Average Turnover	Public agencies (Annual): 20% Private agencies (Annual): 40%
Average Tenure	Public agencies: 7 Years Private agencies: 3 Years Little difference between CPS & Non-CPS tenure
Workload	24 cases in CPS 31 cases in Ongoing Twice CWLA standards
Workplace Organization	44% employed by government 24% union members
Motivation	Reasons workers leave: ■ heavy workload ■ low status ■ low pay ■ poor supervision ■ work-family balance Reasons workers stay: ■ sense of mission ■ good fit with job ■ investment in relationships ■ professional standing
Average Wage Growth	6% for all child welfare workers, 1980-99 For social workers with degrees, 6.5% growth 1992-99

In Montgomery County, Maryland, employees of all types earn CPUs and engage in other forms of professional development. A full-time training coordinator arranges the classes, many of which are offered pro bono. Recent offerings included courses on child visitation procedures, certification in aging, stress management, the operation of the county homeless shelter, working with diverse client groups, drug intervention during pregnancy, and personal safety among child abuse caseworkers.

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As an alternative to the "rule of three," whereby civil service systems force managers to hire one of the three top-scoring applicants for an open position, Massachusetts uses zone scoring, which allows managers to hire any candidate who achieves a grade within a specified range.

Table 4:	Profile of the Child Care Workforce
Estimated Number of Frontline Workers	1.5 million, center-based and licensed family care providers 1 million paid caregivers other than those in centers and family-based programs (includes licensed and unlicensed) Workforce expected to grow 26% by 2008 One-third of workforce composed of paid relatives
Demographics	97% female 60% white; 39% black Average age is 24; younger than the average U.S. worker by more than a decade
Education	Center-Based Staff: Teachers: ■ 33% Bachelors Degree + ■ 47% Some College/Associates Degree ■ 20% High School or Less Assistants: ■ 12% Bachelors Degree + ■ 45% Some College/Associates Degree ■ 43% High School or Less Family Child Care Providers: ■ 18% Bachelors Degree + ■ 38% Some College/Associates Degree ■ 30% High School or Less
Training	Minimal training requirements Less commonly required for family-based care than center-based staff New teachers are less well educated than those they replace and more likely to be poor No state requires programs to be accredited
Estimated Average Salary	$6.70/hour; half the average U.S. wage Nonprofits and affiliated centers pay higher wages and offer more benefits than for-profit centers
Wage Growth	Inflation adjusted wages 1996-2000 have decreased for most workers
Estimated Average Turnover	40%, with spikes of 100-300% at some child care centers Half the workers who leave, leave field altogether
Workplace Organization	5% are unionized
Motivation	Low pay is leading reason for leaving child care work

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Table 5:	Profile of the Juvenile Justice Workforce
Estimated Number of Frontline Workers	300,000 Total 18,000 in juvenile corrections 150,000 residential caseworkers 130,000 substance abuse and behavioral counselors 25,000 rehabilitation counselors
Demographics	Mostly white males 30-49 years old Profile varies by sector (See "Workforce Organization," below)
Training	Average experience in the field: 5-10 years Government workers: A.A./B.A. in corrections Nonprofit workers: B.A./M.A. in social services On-the-job training focuses on control of youth
Estimated Average Salary	$30,000 Half of line staff in government programs earn less than $30,000
Estimated Average Annual Turnover	40-80% (lower in nonprofits)
Workplace Organization	Nonprofits draw younger college graduates, less oriented to a career in the field Public-sector workers are more oriented toward policing dimension of job, more likely to be unionized, less likely to be weeded out for low performance No data on for-profit providers
Workload	41 cases/probation officer 30 cases/officer is recommended
Motivation	Reasons workers leave: ■ long hours ■ high stress ■ low pay ■ inability to impact life chances of youth Reasons workers stay: ■ satisfaction of taking care of people who need them ■ expressions of appreciation from patients; families ■ achieving meaningful care outcomes for clients

In Michigan, the Family Independence Agency (FIA) restructured its hiring process and created a hiring pool that is administered centrally for FIA business offices in each county. Before this centralization, it took a minimum of four months to hire and train replacements. Now, FIA can fill vacancies almost immediately.

Kansas has virtually eliminated civil service testing as a means for screening applicants.

Table 6:	Profile of the Employment and Training Workforce
Estimated Number of Frontline Workers	500,000 (includes 100,000 TANF workers; employment and training specialists)
Training	No federal requirements
Estimated Average Salary	$30,800
Workplace Organization	55% employed by a TANF agency 16% employed by private providers 10% other public providers Unclear where the other 20% work
Workload	Workloads vary; increased with additional responsibilities established under TANF
Motivation	Substantial evidence from surveys of frontline workers of widespread dissatisfaction and confusion about combined and conflicting responsibilities for eligibility/benefits determination and 500,000 job placement

appendix two

Private-Sector Companies the Foundation is Studying for Promising Practices

	Companies
Employment Strategy Performance Management	Home Depot, Inc. Host Marriott Imperial Valley Lumber Lowes Corporation Wal-Mart
Training and Professional Development	IBM McDonalds Motorola Sears, Roebuck and Co. Tricon Global Restaurants (Kentucky Fried Chicken, Taco Bell, Pizza Hut)
Quality of Work Life Improvements	Alcoa Monster.com
Compensation	Bright Horizons, Inc. (child care company) Homer Reed (retail) The Hat Shack, Inc.
Other	Federated Department Stores Nordstrom Ritz-Carlton Office Depot CVS Shop Rite Corporation

One-third of private, nonprofit child welfare agencies reported in a survey that salary enhancements—via broadbanding, pay differentials for on-call work, longevity pay, and raises—reduced staff turnover.

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